

Understanding Teenage Pregnancy Rates Calculations

To understand where Virginia ranks on teenage pregnancy, it is important to understand what the teen pregnancy rate is and how it is calculated. The Virginia Department of Health's (VDH) Center for Health Statistics calculates the number of teenage pregnancies as the sum of live births, induced termination of pregnancy and natural fetal deaths to teenagers ages 10 to 19. Other groups that report or provide state rankings have different methods of determining the number of teenage pregnancies. Most of the charts, tables and reports from VDH's Adolescent Sexual Health Programs will report the teenage pregnancy rate as the rate per 1,000 females of a specified age group. For example the 2004 teenage pregnancy rate for 15 to 19 year olds is 52.3 per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19.

When looking at national rankings it is important to know the data year being reported. The most current data available in Virginia is for 2004. Others reporting Virginia data may be using earlier years. This means rankings may be for as many as five years prior to the current year.

It is also important to look at what information is being ranked. Some groups rank teenage births, while others rank teenage pregnancies. Also some groups provide rankings for 10 – 19 year olds, while others use 15 –17 or 15 – 19 year olds. Some also rank states number one for having the highest rates, while others use a number one ranking for having the lowest rates.

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy released ranking information in 2005. According to this report, Virginia ranked 19th for teenage pregnancies per 1,000 females ages 15 –19 in 2000, with North Dakota ranked first with the lowest rate. The same report ranks Virginia 10th for change in teen pregnancy rates per 1,000 females 15 – 19 between 1992 and 2000, with California ranked 1st with the greatest change. Virginia ranked 22nd for teenage births per 1,000 females 15 to 19 in 2003, with New Hampshire ranked first with the lowest rate. Virginia ranked 20th for change in teenage births per 1,000 females ages 15 – 19 between 1991 and 2003, with Vermont ranked first with the greatest change.

The Alan Guttmacher Institute updated its report “U.S. Teenage Pregnancy Statistics, Overall Trends, Trends by Race and Ethnicity and State-by-State Information” in February 2004, which is based on data from 2000. Virginia ranks 32nd for pregnancy rate per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, with first being the state with the highest rate. Virginia ranks 31st for birth rate per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, also with first being the state with the highest rate. Virginia ranks 20th for abortion rates per 1,000 females ages 15 to 19, with first being the state with the highest rate. It is also important to note that The Alan Guttmacher Institute calculates rates slightly differently than the Virginia Center for Health Statistics.

For more information about teenage pregnancy rates visit:
www.vahealth.org/teenpregnancyprevention/index.htm
www.vdh.virginia.gov/healthstats/index.asp
www.guttmacher.org
www.teenpregnancy.org